

Groups join calls for farmed salmon boycott if no new controls

West coast groups are among nearly 20 bodies which have given backing to an ultimatum and threatened potential boycott of Scottish farmed salmon unless the government confirms it will introduce measures to protect wild salmon and sea trout.

Community groups such as the Friends of Loch Etive and Skye Communities for Natural Heritage are two that have given support for the ultimatum issued by Salmon and Trout Conservation Scotland (STCS).

STCS has accused Scottish Government ministers of allowing parliamentary inquiry reports on salmon farming from 2018 to languish on the shelves without taking any meaningful action on their recommendations.

Andrew Graham-Stewart, director of STCS, said: 'Unless Scottish ministers have confirmed by Easter that they are putting in place appropriate statutory and/or regulatory measures to protect wild salmon and sea trout and that these measures will be in place and in force by the end of 2020, then STCS, together with many other organisations supporting this statement, will call and campaign for a full and complete boycott of all Scottish farmed salmon products.'

The ultimatum and potential boycott are already endorsed and supported by the Angling Trust, Community of Arran Seabed Trust, Craignish Restoration of Marine and Coastal Habitat, Fairlie Coastal Trust, Friends of Loch Etive, Friends of the Sound of Jura, Loch Visions, North and West District Salmon Fishery Board, Open Seas, Orkney Trout Fishing Association, Save Seil Sound, Scottish Creel Fishermen's Federation, Scottish Salmon Think-Tank, Sea Change Wester Ross, Sealife Adventures, Skye Communities for Natural Heritage, South Skye Seas Initiative and Tay Ghillies Association.

Skye Communities for Natural Heritage told the Lochaber Times: 'Two Scottish Parliament committees looked in depth at the open net salmon farming industry, taking input from producers, regulators, planners and objectors.

'Both committees concluded things had to change for the better across the whole gamut of environment, fish health and pollution yet nothing of any significance has happened in almost two years.

'Worse still, the Scottish Government appears hell bent on doubling production over the next 10 years. We do not even see any signs of a willingness to make such changes, nothing but talking shops that kick the can further down the road.

'We fully support STCS's initiative to apply pressure to prompt the right actions from Fergus Ewing and the rest of the Scottish Government in order to save Scottish salmon, our coastal waters and its life. Enough is enough.'

Friends of Loch Etive – where there are rainbow trout farms – commented: 'Two Scottish parliamentary committees have told the government the status quo is not an option, but that status quo persists on Loch Etive.

'Most importantly, MSPs decided fish farms should not be sited near rivers vital for wild

salmon, but wild salmon smolts, leaving the River Awe, arguably the best salmon river on the west coast mainland, have to pass close to no fewer than three farms, all within a few kilometres of the river, on their way out of Loch Etive.

‘The MSPs recommended there should be immediate dialogue to consider relocating poorly-sited farms, but that has not yet happened.’

And South Skye Seas Initiative told us: ‘We fully support the initiative to campaign for a consumer-led boycott of all Scottish farmed salmon, if Scottish Government fails to grasp the nettle and commit to urgent and stringent regulatory measures for the salmon farming industry.’

‘We have waited long enough whilst consistently highlighting the stark regulatory deficiencies. It does seem that Scottish Government is determined to ignore the comprehensive findings of the 2018 Scottish Parliament Inquiry. This leaves us no option but to campaign for a boycott.’

However, Hamish Macdonell, of the Scottish Salmon Producers’ Organisation, hit back saying: ‘It is unsurprising these pressure groups, having failed to get what they wanted during an exhaustive parliamentary process which found “a lack of definitive scientific evidence” of any link between salmon farming and wild fish numbers, are leading this latest initiative.’

‘Scotland’s farmed salmon sector has adopted a whole raft of new measures in the year since the RECC [Rural Economy and Connectivity Committee] report came out, proactively publishing more data than ever before, more quickly than ever before.’

‘Fish health and welfare has never been a higher priority with sea lice levels at their lowest for six years, and medicine use significantly reduced.’